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Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek regime's "action program" represents a drastic departure from past political practices.

An outline of the program, publicized after a presidium meeting on 19 February, calls for a "gradual solution to past problems" through an "open exchange of opinions" and the "widest possible democratization of the entire sociopolitical system." It provides for an end to the party's interference in the management of state, economic, and social institutions. It also calls for the parliament to fulfill its long-withheld constitutional right of functioning as "the supreme organ of state power." The cabinet would be "fully answerable" to the parliament. Organizations, such as trade unions, will be expected to "genuinely express" the interests of their members.

This program should be widely welcomed by the party rank and file and by the general public. It will be opposed, perhaps covertly, by party functionaries and government bureaucrats, who will see in it a threat to their livelihoods. These opponents, however, may not get much support from conservative leaders, some of whom are already on the defensive.

The party presidium also heard a preliminary report on the reorganization of the government; a final report which could well include specific ministerial changes is to be ready by the end of February. This could be ready in time for the plenary session of parliament scheduled for 27-28 February.

The sweeping nature of the action program will be of concern to Soviet and most other East European leaders who are gathering in Prague to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Communist coup. It is not likely, however, that the visiting party chiefs will attempt to interfere at this time.

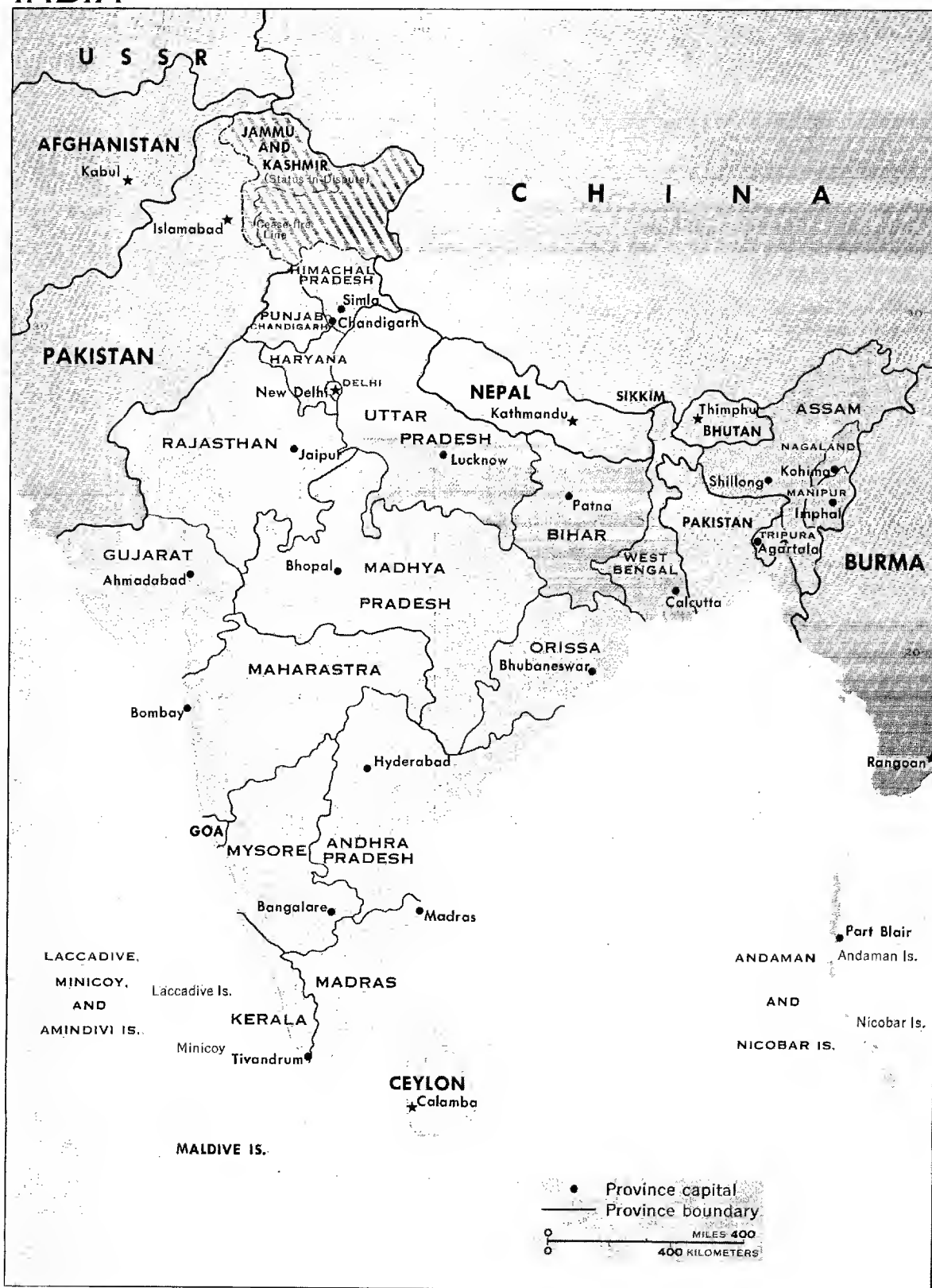
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INDIA



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India: Several northern states are plagued by political instability, and there is little immediate prospect that the situation will improve.

After several months of continuous political turmoil in West Bengal, New Delhi imposed direct rule and dissolved the state assembly. New elections will eventually be held, and the campaign will be bitter. The radical left Communists, although split, may be able to improve their legislative position over the disorganized local Congress Party.

The prospects for governmental stability in neighboring Bihar are equally dim. In late January, Congress was a key factor in toppling the ruling coalition and forging a new one. The local Congress organization is so badly split, however, that the new regime may not last long.

The resignation of the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh has left India's most populous state leaderless. The state governor may have to request direct rule from New Delhi.

Haryana has been under direct rule since last November, and there is little hope that elections in May will produce a viable government. The government of the Punjab lacks a majority and must depend on Congress support to remain in power.

The quickening pace of governmental change in several states reflects both the current aggressiveness of the Congress Party and the inability of the opposition parties to work together. Congress, however, has not been able to translate this disarray into substantially greater political strength in the states.

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El Salvador: The continuing teachers' strike could develop into a threat to the regime's stability.

The government is tangling with the leftist teachers' union (ANDES) for the second time after an indecisive round last October and the current dispute has inspired union walkouts and mass demonstrations. The major political opposition has allied itself with the teachers to gain advantage in next month's election. Student and labor elements could become increasingly caught up in the movement if it continues to gain public support. The government's refusal to remove the education minister in response to teacher demands has blocked compromise.

President Sanchez is loath to use repressive tactics because of likely repercussions in the legislative and municipal elections scheduled for 10 March. ANDES supporters are planning a major demonstration for 23 February. Large-scale disorders could bring pressure from military leaders for more vigorous measures and spark a severe counter-action from student and leftist elements.

[REDACTED]

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Guatemala: Another upsurge of violence hit Guatemala City on 21 February.

The labor director of the US-owned International Railway of Central America (IRCA) was gunned down in his car and another IRCA official riding with him was seriously wounded and is not expected to live. IRCA has been a planned target of the Communist Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), particularly during a current rail strike. The FAR's culpability is suggested also by information that the assailants appeared to be students at the University of San Carlos, a main center of rebel supporters.

A police agent was killed when two time-bombs planted under police cars guarding the homes of the chief of the judicial police and the chief justice of the supreme court went off almost simultaneously.

The 21 February attacks may have been FAR acts of defiance in answer to an official press conference the day before. The chiefs of the three police forces had acknowledged the resurgence of urban terrorism but expressed confidence that the "small redoubts" remaining to the terrorists would be wiped out. They indicated that the security forces have new leads on students and private persons who collaborate with the Communist movement.

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*Canada: The Pearson government is persisting in its attempt to obtain a vote of confidence from Parliament.

The opposition still contends that the defeat of a government tax bill on Monday constituted a loss of confidence and that the minority government is not entitled to a second chance.

The ruling Liberals must choose their tactics skillfully to prevent a stalemate in the parliamentary debate that begins today. If such a deadlock persisted, the prime minister would probably resign or request a dissolution of Parliament.

The government is likely to win a confidence vote, but its future effectiveness would be decreased considerably. The Liberals might then go to the electorate--after a successor to Pearson is chosen in early April.

NOTE

Southern Yemen: Leftists are gaining ground in Aden. In an interview this week, President Qahtan al-Shaabi gave the clear impression that his government is not interested in any but minimal relations with the US. Virulent anti-US material is appearing in government-controlled press and radiobroadcasts. At the same time, the Adenis are needling the British with a variety of actions that might move London to cut off the British subsidy, Southern Yemen's only visible means of staying solvent the rest of this year.

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